Neighborhood Networks

Linking Residents to Healthcare Resources

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The guides in this series offer information on starting a center, creating programs and identifying center partners, marketing and media outreach, sustainability, funding, and much more. These updated guides feature new contacts, resources, case studies, and helpful information.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based Initiative established by HUD in 1995 that continues to strengthen and grow throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These community learning centers provide residents of HUD insured and assisted properties with programs, activities, and training that promote economic self-sufficiency.

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To receive copies of this publication or any others in the series, contact:

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> Neighborhood Networks Information Center
> Toll-free: (888) 312–2743
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> TTY: (800) 483–2209

All publications are available from the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*.

Copies of this TA guide are available in Spanish and can be requested from the Neighborhood Networks toll-free Information Center at (888) 312–2743.

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Many low-income individuals and families lack access to preventive and primary healthcare, often relying on emergency room visits in a crisis. Yet families need good health so parents can work and children can succeed at school. Elderly or disabled residents often have chronic conditions that require regular treatment if they are to enjoy the best possible quality of life.

By providing Internet access, Neighborhood Networks centers make it possible for residents to go online to get up-to-date information about specific diseases, eligibility for health insurance, drug discount programs, and other health matters. Centers also distribute health information, sponsor health fairs, or inform residents about government health insurance programs for which they qualify. In addition, in partnership with local hospitals, agencies, or nonprofit groups, Neighborhood Networks centers may participate in ongoing health programs or sponsor periodic health screenings, vaccinations for children, exercise or smoking cessation classes, and a variety of other activities.

Identify Residents' Needs

What health programs do residents need? What do they want? How many people might show up for a high blood pressure check, to get a flu shot, or to find out about new prescription discount programs? For answers to these questions, it is necessary to ask residents directly and to talk to people who know and work with them.

As a starting point, demographic data compiled by property managers can provide a basic count of children and adults in a development. To get an indication of interest in a particular activity, place a sign-up sheet in the property management office or a flyer under unit doors. If a formal survey of resident needs is planned, be sure to include questions on health insurance coverage and interest in particular services.

Talk with people who work with residents, such as property managers, leaders of resident organizations, Neighborhood Networks staff, HUD Service Coordinators, staff of local clinics or emergency rooms, teachers at local schools, and staff of nearby churches and religious institutions.

Ask such questions as: What do you see as the most significant health problems for residents? Roughly what proportion of eligible residents would you estimate are actually signed up for Medicaid, Medicare, or the children's health insurance program in the state? Do you see healthcare problems as a barrier to parents working or training? Do families moving from welfare to work have difficulties obtaining health insurance? Do residents have access to dental services or other specialized care?

Talk about the causes of problems. Can residents afford care? Do they face transportation barriers or language difficulties? Are residents discouraged by the complexity of health programs? Do they know where to seek help?

Take notes and summarize the information in writing, both to better understand resident healthcare needs and to explain these needs to potential community partners.

Identify Community Resources

Most health-related activities involve bringing in resources, such as public health services, government health insurance coverage, local health facilities, and community groups. National organizations and their local affiliates may provide information and other assistance online or over the telephone.

Taking a community survey of health resources. Brainstorm with the resident service

council, property managers, Neighborhood Networks staff, HUD Service Coordinators, community leaders, school system health workers, elected officials, and others. Check local phone books and online search engines. Make a list of resources, including local hospitals and clinics; city or county health agencies; local chapters of national medical and health service organizations; charities interested in health and nutrition issues; and local gyms, fitness programs, food retailers, or weight-loss programs. These resources might be willing to take part in a project to benefit community residents.

Helping residents with healthcare costs. Many state and federal programs exist to provide health insurance for low-income people and lower the cost of prescription drugs, especially for the elderly.

- **Medicaid,** a federal health insurance program, pays for medical assistance for certain individuals and families with low incomes *(www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaid/consumer.asp).*

- **Medicare,** a federal health insurance program, pays for hospital and medical expenses for elderly people (age 65+) or for people with certain disabilities or conditions *(www.medicare.gov/default.asp).*

- **State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP),** a set of state-operated programs, provides health insurance for children, up to age 19, who are not otherwise insured *(www.cms.hhs.gov/schip/consumers_default. asp* or *www.insurekidsnow.gov/).*

- **Head Start,** a federal early childhood education program, also provides health screenings, evaluation, and service coordination for low-income children *(www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/about/index. htm).*

- **BenefitsCheckup,** an online screening service operated by National Council on Aging initiated through a HUD partnership in 2000, helps people ages 55+ find out if they are eligible for various programs that help with some costs of prescription drugs, healthcare, utilities, and other essential items or services *(www.benefitscheckup.org/).*

- **BenefitsCheckupRx,** an online screening service operated by the Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC), helps people decide among various prescription discounts such as the Medicare-approved drug card, state pharmacy programs, and other prescription assistance programs. ABC's Organizational Edition trains community groups in expert use of the screening tool *(http://bcuoe2.benefitscheckup.org/ frmwelcome2.cfm?cfid=91396&cftoken= 33025978).*

Market to and Develop Partners

For health-related programs, community partners can provide visits by skilled staff or mobile diagnostic equipment, expertise, information, volunteers, or donations of supplies. Neighborhood Networks centers bring to the partnership access to an underserved community, a reliable point of contact, and a potential space to hold health activities.

Approach potential partners with a variety of ideas, solid information about community needs, and a willingness to learn what they may be able to provide.

Establish a Program

Structure health projects or programs to respond to local needs and available resources.

- Define how the program will be organized and carried out, specifying the roles of resident service council members, property managers, and other in-house stakeholders.

- Establish goals with measurable outcomes such as the number of potential partners to approach, volunteers to involve, residents to serve, dates for visits by diagnostic vans, and progress milestones.

- Identify where necessary resources (staffing, equipment, and supplies) will come from.

- Be clear about how the program will deal with accessibility and security issues.

- Establish a mechanism to deal with unexpected problems.

- Follow up with thank-you letters to all community partners after the project.

Market Programs to Residents

Market health events and services to residents through announcements in the property management office, Neighborhood Networks center, and places where residents visit. Distribute flyers to units by mail or by going door to door.

Publicity aimed at the wider community will also resonate with residents. Mail flyers to school principals, clergy, elected officials, heads of local non-profits, and other community leaders. Send out a press release to local radio, television, newspapers, and "shoppers" newspapers. Community partners may have media expertise and be willing to share in the publicity work.

Assess Outcomes and Revise Programs as Needed

At the completion of a health project, prepare a written summary report, including information such as:

- Project or event: date(s), purpose of event, number of people served.

- Internal information: Who did what? What roles did the resident council, Neighborhood Networks center, and property manager play? Note names and contact information of key people.

- Partnership information: names of partner organizations with contact information of key people.

- Successes: Did the project meet or exceed the measurable goals set?

- Problems: What problems emerged or what should people look out for in the future?

Consider how to share evaluation findings with residents, staff, partners, and other stakeholders. To help assess and track their health programs, centers can use START—HUD's Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool. Using this online tool, Neighborhood Networks centers can complete annual assessments of their health programs and other activities based on the center's business plan projections. A large health program may call for a formal evaluation. Local colleges may supply student volunteers to plan and carry out an evaluation under faculty supervision.

Examples of Health-Related Activities at NN Centers

Crescent Park Multi-Cultural Family Resource Center (Richmond, California) developed a partnership with HOPE for Kids in a 2000 event to deliver information about the California Healthy Kids initiative to all units while volunteers answered questions. In the fall of 2004, the center made available confidential HIV/AIDS testing and hosted an information session on county health and other resources for seniors. Currently, the center is establishing partnerships with First 5 to use Contra Costa County cigarette tax funds to provide health resources to children ages 0–5 and also with Doctor's Medical Center on a health and wellness program for families in HUD-assisted housing. Contact: Leonard McNeil, director, (510) 232–7424, ext. 11, lmcneil@eahhousing.org.

Houston Neighborhood Networks, Inc., a nonprofit consortium of Houston centers, developed a partnership with Preventive Healthcare Outreach, Inc., and St. Joseph's Hospital in 2003 to provide onsite comprehensive medical services to families and senior citizens at five Neighborhood Networks centers. In 2004 Preventive Healthcare Outreach continues to provide onsite health fairs offering preventive healthcare services to residents through Neighborhood Networks centers and at other HUD-subsidized multifamily complexes. Contact: Mary Frances Byrd, Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, (713) 718–3174, Mary_Frances_Byrd@hud.gov.

Online Resources

Using the Internet, residents can learn about diseases and how they are treated, clinical trials for new medicines and treatments,

health insurance benefits, and alternative therapies. Residents can also join online support groups for families and contact local affiliates and support groups. *Note:* Exercise caution when using the Internet to research healthcare options, gather information, or take part in online forums, because not all information is reliable. Healthcare decisions should be made in consultation with a physician.

General Health Information

Healthfinder®, National Health Information Center, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.healthfinder.gov
Healthfinder® Kids
www.healthfinder.gov/kids/

National Institute on Aging—Age Pages
www.niapublications.org

Aetna Intelihealth
www.intelihealth.com

Better Health Magazine
Saint Rafael Health Systems
www.srhs.org/betterhealth.asp

Dr. Koop
www.drkoop.com

WebMD
www.webmd.com

Information on Specific Diseases

Alzheimer's disease: Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org

Arthritis: Arthritis Foundation
www.arthritis.org

Cancer: American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

Heart disease: American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

Lung disease: American Lung Association
www.lungusa.org

Diabetes: American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

Mental health: National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/index.cfm

Medical Research

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov

Mayo Clinic
www.mayohealth.org

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov/health

Neighborhood Networks Information

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org* or contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312–2743, or TTY at (800) 483–2209. The Web site contains valuable information for centers, including:

HUD NN Coordinators
Neighborhood Networks Coordinators listing.

Center Database
Information about operational centers and those in planning. Neighborhood Networks centers across the U.S. listed geographically by state.

Property Database
Information about Neighborhood Networks properties listed geographically by state.

Resources Database
Information about funding, technical assistance, publications, and Web site resources.

News Database
Articles, press releases, success stories, and grand openings relevant to Neighborhood Networks.

List of Conferences
Calendar of conferences and training events.

List of Resident Associations
List of Neighborhood Networks properties with active resident associations.

Neighborhood Networks Consortia
List of Neighborhood Networks consortia.

Senior Properties
List of senior properties with operational Neighborhood Networks centers.

Online Networking
Talk with Neighborhood Networks staff and stakeholders via online networking.

Publications

- **Fact sheets.** Fact sheets are one-page summaries of various topics relevant to the operations of Neighborhood Networks centers. Fact sheets that are currently available include an overview of the Initiative, health information, childcare, transportation, seniors, and community improvements at Neighborhood Networks centers.

- *Network News* (current and past issues). A semiannual newsletter that highlights national achievements for a wide audience, including partners and the public.

- *NNewsline* (current and past issues). A semiannual newsletter that highlights topics of interest to Neighborhood Networks centers and Coordinators.